

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1023

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

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SUBJECT: GOVT EFFORTS TO END SUGAR STRIKE HAVE ONLY LIMITED EFFECT

REF: GEORGETOWN 0396

1. SUMMARY: GOVT EFFORTS TO END SUGAR STRIKE, NOW IN ITS FOURTH WEEK, HAVE HAD LIMITED EFFECT. MINISTER OF LABOR HAS APPOINTED VICTOR CRANE TO ARBITRATE DISPUTE BETWEEN SUGAR WORKERS AND INDUSTRY, BUT IT IS STILL NOT CERTAIN THAT UNRECOGNIZED GUYANA AGRICULTURAL WORKERS UNION WHICH IS LEADING STRIKE WILL ACCEPT ARBITRATION. FOR THREE WEEK PERIOD OF STRIKE INDUSTRY HAS AVERAGED PRODUCTION OF TWO THOUSAND TONS PER WEEK COMPARED WITH NINE THOUSAND TONS PER WEEK NORMAL FIGURE FOR MARCH. WHILE GOVT STRATEGY OF COMPULSORY ARBITRATION HAS NOT BROUGHT WORKERS BACK TO WORK, IT HAS DELAYED MORE SERIOUS CONFRONTATION BETWEEN WORKERS AND GOVT. END SUMMARY.

2. GOVT EFFORTS TO END STRIKE IN SUGAR INDUSTRY, NOW IN ITS FOURTH WEEK, HAVE HAD ONLY LIMITED EFFECT SO FAR. ON MARCH 22, MINISTER OF LABOR WINSLOW CARRINGTON INVOKED RECENTLY PASSED ARBITRATION LEGISLATION (REFTEL) AND APPOINTED JUSTICE VICTOR

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CRANE TO ARBITRATE DISPUTE BETWEEN MANPOWER CITIZENS ASSOCIATION

(MPCA) AND GUYANA SUGAR PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION (GSPA). IN CONJUNCTION WITH APPOINTMENT OF ARBITRATOR, CARRINGTON ALSO TOURED SUGAR ESTATES ON WEST COAST DEMERARA, AND GOVT INSITUATED PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN ON SUGAR ESTATES TO ENCOURAGE WORKERS TTO RETURN TO JOBS. HOWEVER, SUGAR INDUSTRY STRIKE REPORT FOR BEGINNING OF THIS WEEK SHOWS ONLY SLIGHT IMPROVEMENT ON SEVERAL ESTATES AND SITUATIO UNCHANGED ON REMAINDER. SUGAR INDUSTRY SOURCE ALSO REPORTS THAT LABOR MINISTER CARRINGTON WAS GIVEN HOSTILE RECEPTION ON HIS TOUR OF ESTATES.

3. DESPITE THIS INITIALLY UNFAVORABLE WORKER RESPONSE TO ARBITRATION, GOVT HOPES FOR SETTLEMENT CONTINUE TO REST ON QUICK DECISION BY ARBITRATION TRIBUNAL TO INCREASE WORKER BENEFITS. JUSTICE CRANE IS REPORTEDLY PREPARED TO HOLD FIRST SESSION OF ARBITRATION TRIBUNAL NEXT WEEK. GSPA HAS ALREADY PREPARED MEMORANDA TO SUBMIT IN SUPPORT OF ITS CASE, BUT MPCA, RECOGNIZED UNION FOR FIELD AND FACTORY WORKERS, IS RESPONDING MORE SLOWLY. MINISTER OF LABOR CARRINGTON HAS ANNOUNCED THAT UNRECOGNIZED BUT POWERFUL GUYANA GRICULTURAL WORKERS UNION (GAWU), LABOR ARM OF OPPOSITION PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP), WILL BE INVITED TO APPEAR BEFORE ARBITRATION TRIBUNAL. HOWEVER, IT IS STILL NOT CLEAR IF GAWU WILL ACCEPT INVITATION. GAWU HONORARY PRESIDENT AND PPP LEADER CHEDDI JAGAN, WHO HAS BEEN TAKING ACTIVE ROLE IN STRIKE, TOLD CHARGE MARCH 24 THAT GAWU STRIKE WILL CONTINUE AND WOULD NOT SPECULATE ON WHEN IT MIGHT BE CALLED OFF.

4. AS OF END OF THIRD WEEK OF STRIKE, SUGAR PRODUCTION FOR ENTIRE SPRING CROP REACHED 49,000 TONS COMPARED WITH 62,000 TONS AT SAME TIME LAST FALL. FOR THREE WEEK PERIOD OF STRIKE, TOTAL OF APPROXIMATELY 6,000 TONS OF SUGAR HAS BEENPRODUCED. NORMALLY SUGAR INDUSTRY AVERAGES PRODUCTION OF 9,000 TONS PER WEEK DURING MARCH. WHILE SOME SUGAR PRODUCTION WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE LOST AND INDUSTRY MAY BE UNABLE TO MEET TIMING OF SOME LUCRATIVE CONTRACTS, SUGAR INDUSTRY OFFICIALS CONTINUE TO SAY OVERALL PRODUCTION LOSS COULD BE MINIMIZED BY RETURN TO WORK AFTER EASTER HOLIDAYS AND FAVORABLE WEATHER FOR REMAINDER OF HARVEST. AT LEAST TWO SHIPS IN GEORGETOWN HARBOR AWAITING SUGAR. ONE VESSEL AWAITING 3300 TONS SHIPMENT FOR U.S.

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5. COMMENT: WHILE GOVT STRATEGY OF COMPULSORY ARBITRATION HAS BEEN SLOW TO PRODUCE RESLTS, IT HAS POSTPONED SERIOUS CONFRONTATION BETWEEN GOVT AND SUGAR WORKERS AND HAS KEPT DOOR OPEN FOR COMPROMISE. CONFRONTATION COULD STILL OCCUR, HOWEVER, IF GOVT LOSES PATIENCE, IF WORKERS BEHIND GAWU LEADERSHIP REFUSE TO GO BACK TO WORK WHILE ARBITRATION IS PROCEEDING, OR IF WORKERS REFUSE TO ACCEPT FINAL AWARD.
MATTHEWS

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